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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
21 August 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Free World Reaction to Events in Czechoslovakia (as of 1630 hours)

Summary

Free World reaction to the military intervention in Czechoslovakia has been almost universally critical although little reporting is available as yet from areas other than Western Europe. A number of key officials in Europe were on vacation at the time of the event. The tone of comment has ranged from Belgium's expression of "consternation" and condemnation of "methods of coercion which nothing can justify" to Austria's reassertion of its neutrality and its announcement of a military alert. There have been demonstrations before Soviet and other Communist diplomatic establishments in several countries.

Europe

1. The United Kingdom and West Germany reacted promptly and strongly. Prime Minister Wilson called the invasion "a tragedy not only for Czechoslovakia but for Europe and the whole world."

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The British Parliament has been called for an emergency session on 26 August. Britain's attitude was echoed by Prime Minister Holyoake of New Zealand who stated that the invasion turned the clock back to the darkest days of the cold war.

2. German Chancellor Kiesinger called a cabinet meeting and then issued a statement branding the invasion "a clear violation of Czech sovereignty and interference in its internal affairs." A West German Defense Ministry spokesman indicated that the Federal Republic would assume the same attitude as other members of the NATO alliance. In Bavaria,

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steps were taken to provide for potential Czech refugees. In both Britain and Germany demonstrators appeared before Soviet embassies.

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3. French President de Gaulle's main concern was with the effect on the European detente which France had been trying to foster. Deploring the events in Czechoslovakia, which he felt constituted an attack on the rights and destiny of a friendly nation, De Gaulle indicated that Moscow apparently still could not free itself from "bloc politics" which interfered with the rights of people to manage their own affairs. Italian Foreign Minister Medici felt that the world had returned to "the period before Camp David" and that revitalization of NATO and progress toward political integration of Europe had now become more urgent. Italian Prime Minister Leone was not in Rome when news of the invasion was received.

4. Belgium and the Netherlands strongly condemned the Soviet action. The Belgian Acting Foreign Minister expressed his government's consternation, and the Belgian radio drew obvious parallels with the 1956 invasion of Hungary. In the Hague, both the government and the opposition Labor Party issued strong condemnations. The public reacted with shock and horror. Demonstrations were expected and police were assigned to guard East European embassies. Luxembourg officially announced its consternation at Czech developments.

5. In Scandinavia, Denmark took the lead with a government statement which stated in part that "for all freedom-loving people, the events must be felt as a tragedy." All Danish military leaves were cancelled, and the cabinet was to hold an emergency meeting. Swedish Prime Minister Erlander issued a statement deplored the intervention and expressing deep concern for the "sorrow and disappointment" that must be felt by the Czech people. Swedish press comment is not yet available, but the conservative press may take the government to task for its weak reaction in the face of all it has said about US involvement in Vietnam. The Finnish public reportedly was stunned and worried by the Soviet action, and demonstrations against the Soviet Embassy seemed likely.

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6. In central Europe, Austrian Chancellor Klaus addressed the nation on 21 August to reassure Austrians and visiting foreigners of their safety and to serve notice indirectly to the USSR that Austria did not intend to interfere at present.

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[redacted] There has been no official reaction from Switzerland as yet, but Swiss citizens were quick to demonstrate before the Soviet and Polish embassies in Bern.

Middle East

7. The Greek, Turkish, and Iranian governments are apparently concerned, but there has been no official reaction from them as yet. Privately, they are almost certain to be adversely affected by the Soviet move. Popular sympathy for Czechoslovakia is likely to run high in Turkey, but the Turkish radio has confined itself so far to full tactical reporting. Nothing significant has been heard from the Arab states as yet. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who is torn between moral considerations and India's dependence on Soviet military aid, has informed parliament of her "anguish." She hopes that the military forces which had entered Czechoslovakia would withdraw shortly. She stated that the rights of a nation to live peacefully without outside interference should not be denied in the name of religion or ideology.

Far East

8. In this area only Japan and Malaysia have reacted as yet. Japanese official reaction has been confined to a statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary to the effect that the Soviet intervention is unacceptable "whatever the reason." Press and radio comment has been sparse and limited to expressions of concern. Small groups have demonstrated before the Soviet Embassy. Malaysian Prime Minister Rahman has termed the Soviet action "most unfortunate," stating that any country that used force in this manner was a threat to Malaysia. The Deputy Prime Minister echoed these sentiments. Malaysian leaders now may have second thoughts regarding their recent policy of encouraging closer relations with the USSR.

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Africa

9. Reaction from Africa so far has been universally critical. The President of the Malagasy Republic was quoted on the national radio as calling the invasion "shameful" and "revolting." He went on to say that "this affair shows us once more that to join up with the Communists is to accept their subjugation, to agree to be their tool, and thus to renounce freedom of choice and self-determination." Tunisian Foreign Minister Bourguiba expressed deep concern to a US Embassy official. The Kenyan Foreign Minister stated that "gunboat diplomacy" was out of place in the second half of the 20th century.

10. A Congo (Kinshasa) spokesman made a statement critical of the use of brute force against Czechoslovakia and said the Congo would recall its students from countries which had participated in the invasion. The Ethiopian radio gave unusually detailed coverage of Czech events, terming the movement of Communist military forces a "full invasion." The government has ordered news media not to editorialize, however. In Sierra Leone, several cabinet ministers have notified the US Embassy of their concern and disapproval, but the Minister of Information says no public statement is likely. The government of Nigeria is also concerned, but has no direct information sources of its own and has not yet commented publicly.

Latin America

11. Reaction from Central and South America is light. The Brazilian Foreign Minister has condemned the Soviet action, telling reporters that the news was received with surprise and that the invasion is a violation of the principles of the UN charter. He added that freedom and Communism were irreconcilable. In Chile, a TV commentator stated that Russia cannot allow neutrality in central Europe for fear its own security would be weakened, and he suggested that Czechoslovakia had suffered the same fate as Hungary. Early morning papers in Latin America carried full news reports but little editorial comment.

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International

12. At the United Nations, Secretary General U Thant issued a statement deplored Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and appealing to the Russians to exercise restraint. U Thant also canceled his plans to visit Prague shortly. The United States and four other countries called for a meeting of the UN Security Council on the afternoon of 21 August. NATO officials are keeping a close watch on the situation. In Rome, Pope Paul VI indirectly appealed to the Soviet Union and its allies not to destroy the dignity and liberty of the Czech people.

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